

THE
WIFE
OF
BEITH

By CHAUCER.

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Much better reformed, enlarged and corrected, than it was formerly.

A NEW EDITION.



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IN *Beath* once dwelt a worthy wife,
 of whom brave Chaucer mention makes,
 She liv'd a licentious life,
 and namely in veneral acts;
 But death did come for all her cracks,
 when years was spent and days out driven,
 Then suddenly she sickness takes,
 deceast forthwith and went to heaven.
 But as she went upon the way,
 there followed her a certain guide,
 And kindly to her he did say,
 where me n you dame for to abide?
 I know you are the wife of *Beath*,
 and would not then that you go wrong;
 For I'm your friend and wou d be loath,
 that you go throw the n rrow throng:
 This way is broader, go with me,
 and very plealant is the way:
 I'll bring you there where you would be,
 go with me friend, say me not nay,
 She look d on him and then did spier,
 I pray you fir, What is your name?
 Show me the way that you come here,
 to tell to me it is no shame:
 Is that a favour about thy neck?
 and what is that upon your side?
 Is it a bag or silver sack;
 What are you then where do you bide?
 I was a servant unto CHRIST;
 and JUDAS also is my name.
 I knew you by your colour first,
 indeed fir you ar to blame;
 Your master did you not betray?
 wherefore you bide I will not stay.
 Go then you knave let me a one.
 Whatever I be I'll ye your guide
 bec use you know not well the way
 Will you but once in me confide,
 I'll do all friendship that I may.

What would you have, where do you dwell?

I have no will to go with thee;

I fear it is some lower cell,

I pray thee therefore let me be.

This is a stormy night and cold,

I'll bring you to a rich warm inn,

Will ye go forward and behold,

and mend your pace till you win in.

I'm fear'd your inn will be too warm,

for too much hotness is not best,

I know your way it is to hell

for you are none of the ELEVEN,

Go haste you then into your cell,

my way is only into HEAVEN.

That way is by the gates of hell,

If you intend there for to go,

Good dame I will not you compel,

but I will go with you also,

Then down they went a right steep hill,

where smoke and dust did much abound,

And pitch and sulphur burnt still,

with yells and cries hell did resound;

The Fiend himself came to the gate.

I will not have you here good dame.

For you are mistress of the of the flying,

if once into these gates you came

I will be troubled with your biting.

Cummer gae back and let me be,

here are too many of thi' rout;

For women lewd like unto thee,

I cannot turn my foot about.

Sir thief, I say, I shall bide out.

But, gossip was thou never to me.

For to come in I'm not so stout,

and of my biting thou's be free:

But *Lucifer*, what's that to thee?

hast thou no water in his place,

Thou look'd so black, it seems to me,

thou ne'er does wash thy ugly face.

If we had water for so drink,

we would not care for washing then :
 Into these flames, and filthy stink,
 we burn with fire unto the doom ;
 Upbraid me then good wife no more,
 for first when I heard of thy name,
 I know thou had such words in store,
 would make the devil to think shame.
 Forsooth, fir thief, you are to blame,
 if I had time for to abide.
 Once you were well but may think shame,
 That lost H. AVEN for rebellious pride,
 Who traitor like fell with the rest,
 because thou would not be content,
 And now of blis are disposest,
 without all grace for to repent ;
 Thou mad'st poor mother E.VA consent,
 to eat of the forbidden tree,
 Which we poor daughters may repent,
 and makes us almo't like to thee ;
 But GOD be blest that past thee by,
 and did a SAVIOUR provide,
 Fo ADAM's whole posterity,
 all those who do in him confide ;
 Adieu false fiend, I may not bide,
 with thee I may no longer stay
 My GOD in death he was my guide,
 o'er hell I'll get the victory.
 Then up the hill the poor wife went,
 oppress'd with stinking flames of fear,
 Weeping right sore with great relent,
 for to go else she wist not where ;
 A narrow way with thorns and briers,
 and full of mires were her before ;
 She sigh'd oft with sobs and tears,
 the poor wife's heart was wonderous sore :
 Tir'd and torn she went on still,
 sometimes she sat, and sometimes fell,
 Ay till she came to a high hill,
 and then she look'd back to hell ;
 When that she had climb'd up the hill,

then rose and to her feet again,
 Her heart was glad, the way was good,
 up to the hill she hy'd with haste,
 The flowers was fair where that she stood,
 the fields were pleasant to her taste,
 There then she spied *Jerusalem*,
 on *Zion's* mount where that she stood,
 Shining with gold like to the sun,
 this silly soul then was right glad;
 The ports were pearls shining with gold,
 glorious it was for to behold
 With precious stones gave such a light,
 the walls were of transparent gold,
 High were the walls, the gates were shut,
 and long they thought for to be in,
 But then for fear of biding out,
 she knocked hard and made some din.

To knock and cry she did not spare,
 till father *ADAM* did her hear.

Who is't that raps so loudly there?

HEAVEN cannot well be won by weir,
 The wife of *Beith* since that you spier,
 hath stood these two hours at the gate,
 Go back, quoth he, thou must forbear,
 here may no sinners enterance get.

ADAM said she, I shall be in,
 in spite of all such churls as thee,

Thou art the original of all sin,
 for eating of the forbidden tree,

But for thy soul offences fled

for which thou art not flyting free.

ADAM went back and let her be,

looking as if his nose had bled;

Then mother *EVE* did at him spier,
 who was it there that made such din?

He said a woman would be here,

for me I durst not let her in;

I'll go quoth she, and ask her will,

her company I would have fain;

But ay she cried, and knocked still,

and in no ways would refrain;
 Daughter, said EVE, you will do well,
 and come again another time;
 Heaven is not won by sword or steel,
 nor none that's guilty of a crime;
 Mother, said she, the fault is thine,
 that knocking here so long I stand,
 Thy guilt is more by far than mine,
 if thou would rightly understand,
 Thou wast the cause of all our sins,
 wherein we're born and conceiv'd,
 Our miseries thou didst begin,
 by thee thy husband was deceiv'd.
 EVE then went back where NOAH was,
 and told him all, how she was blam'd
 With her great sin, and first trespass,
 whereof she was so much asham'd.
 Then NOAH said, I will go down,
 and will forbid her that she knock,
 Go back she said, ye drunken lo'n,
 you're none of the celestial stock.
 NOAH, said she, hold thou thy peace,
 where I drank ale thou didst drink wine,
 Discover'd was, to thy disgrace,
 when thou wast full like to a swine;
 If I drank I learn'd of thee,
 for thou'rt the father, and the first
 That others taught; add likewise me,
 to drink when as we had no thirst.
 Then NOAH in haste turn'd back with speed,
 and told the patriarch ABRAHAM then,
 How that the carling made him dread,
 and all his deed how she did ken.
 ABRAHAM, said she, will ye but spier,
 I hope you are not flyting free;
 You of yourself had such a care,
 deny'd yourself and made a lie,
 Oh, then I pray you let me be,
 for I repent me of my sin,
 Do thou but open the gates to me,

and let me quietly come in.

ABRAHAM went back to JACOB then,
and told his nephew how he sped,
How that of her he nothing wan,
he thought the carling was right mad,
Then down came JACOB thro' the close,
and said go backward down to hell;
JACOB, quoth she, I know thy voice,
that gave pertaineth to yoursel';
Of thy old trumperies I can tell,
with two sister's thou leadst thy life,
The third part of the tribes twelve
thou got with maid's beside thy wife;
And stole thy father's banilon,
only by fraud thy brother frae,
Gave thou him not for venison,
a kid instead of beaken rea.
JACOB himself was tickled so,
he went to LOT where he was lying,
And to the gate pray'd him to go,
and stanch the carling of her crying.
LOT says, fair dame make less ado,
and come again another day,
Old harlot carle and drunkard too,
thou with with thine own daughters lay,
Of thine untimely seed I say,
proceedeth never good but ill.
Poor LOT for shame he stole away,
and let the wife still crack her fill.
Meek MOSES then went down at last,
to pacify the carling then;
Now dame said he, knock not so fast,
your knocking will not let you ben-
Good sir, said she I am a-ghast,
when that I look you in the face,
If that your law till now had last,
then surely I had ne'er got grace;
But MOSES, sir, by your leave,
altho' in Heaven you be posselt,
For all you saw did not believe,

but you in *Horeb* these transgress; Duo
 Then AARON said, I will not swear, HASSA
 but I'll conjure her as I can, Duo, lns.
 And I will make her now forbear, Duo, lns.
 so that she shall not rap again.
 Then AARON said, thou whorish wife,
 go get you gone and rap no more;
 (With idols you have led your life,) Duo, lns.
 or then you shall repent it sore,
 Good AARON, priest, I know you well,
 the golden calf you may remember,
 Who made the people plagues to feel,
 'tis of you recorded ever;
 Your priesthood now is nothing worth,
 CHRIST is my only priest and he,
 My LORD, who will not keep me forth,
 so I'll be in spite of thee.
 Then up starts SAMSON at the length,
 unto the gate apace came he,
 To drive away the wife by strength,
 but all in vain it would not be.
 SAMSON, quoth she, the world may see,
 thou was a judge that prov'd unjust,
 Those gracious gifts that God gave thee,
 thou lost then, by licentious lust,
 From DELILAH thy wicked wife,
 thy secrets could not thou refrain,
 She daily sought to take thy life,
 thou lost thy fight when thou was slain,
 Though thou was strong, it was in vain,
 hunting with harlot's here and there.
 Then SAMSON turning back again,
 and with the wife would meet no mair.
 Then said king DAVID knock no more,
 we are all troubled with your crying,
 DAVID, quoth she, why cam'st thou here,
 thou mightst bide out as well as I,
 Thy deeds no way thou canst deny,
 is not thy sins far worse than mine?
 Who with URIAH's wife did ly,

and caus'd him to be murther'd syne.

Then JUDITH said, who's there that knocks?

and to your neighbour's gives these notes,

Madam, she said let be your mock's,

I come not here for cutting throats;

I am a sinner full of bloats,

Yet thro' CHRIST's blood I shall be clean,

If you and I were judg'd by votes,

the things thou did'st was worse done.

Then said the sapient SOLOMON,

thou art a sinner all men say,

Therefore our SAVIOUR I do suppose,

the Heavenly enterance will deny.

Remember quoth she, the latter day,

what idol gods thou did up set,

And grew so lewd at Venus play,

thou did'st thy MAKER quite forget.

Then JONAH. quoth she, how stands the case,

how came you here to be with CHRIST?

How dare you look him in the face?

considering how you broke your tryft;

To GOD's errand thou withstood him,

and held his counsel in disdain;

The raven messenger thou play'd him,

and brought no message back again;

With mercy thou was not content

when that the LORD he did them spare,

Although the city did repent,

it grieved thee, thy heart was fair;

Let me alone and speak no more,

go back again into your whale,

For now my heart is also sore,

but yet I hope I shall prevail.

Good JONAH said, crack on your fill,

for here I may no longer tarry,

Yea knock as long as e'er ye will,

and go into th' fire farie.

JONAH. she said, ye do miscarry,

as I have done in former times,

You're not St PETER, nor St MARY,

thy bloat's as black as e'er was mine.
 So JONAH then he was aſham'd,
 be-cause he was not flyting free;
 Of all his faults ſhe had him blam'd,
 he left her then and let her be.
 Saint THOMAS, I counſel thee;
 go ſpeak unto this wicked wiſe,
 She ſhames us all; and for me,
 her like I never heard in life.
 THOMAS then ſaid, you make much ſtriſe,
 when you are out there's meikle din,
 If you were here, 'll lay my life,
 no peace the Saints would get within;
 It is your trade for to be flyting,
 ſtill in a fever as one raves,
 No marvel tho' you wives be biting,
 your tongues were made of aſpen leaves.
 THOMAS quoth ſhe, let be your Saints,
 you play the pick-thank I perceive,
 Tho' thou be brother'd with the Saints,
 an unbelieving heart you have;
 You brought our LORD unto the gaave,
 but wou'dſt no longer with him remain,
 And was the laſt of all the lave,
 that did believe he roſe again;
 There might no doctrine do the good,
 no miracles made thee co: fide
 Till thou beheld CHRIST's wounds & blood
 and put'ſt thine hand into his ſide;
 Did'ſt thou not daily with him dine,
 and ſaw'ſt the miracles which he wrought
 But bleſt are they who do conſide,
 and do believe but ſaw him nought.
 THOMAS, ſhe ſays, will ye but ſpier,
 if that my ſiſter MAGDALEN
 Will come to me, if ſhe be here:
 for comfort ſure ſhe'd give me more.
 He was ſo blyth and turned back,
 and thanked GOD that he was gone,
 He had no will to hear her crack,

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but told it MARY MAGDALEN.
When that she saw her sister's mocks,
she went unto the gate with speed,
And asked her, where that knocks?
It's I the wife, with faith indeed.
She said, go, for yeels you must stand,
till you be past tribulation.
Sister, she said, take me your hand,
are we not both of one vocation?
It is not through your occupation,
that you're placed so divine;
My faith is fix'd on CHRIST's passion,
my soul shall be as safe as thine.
Then MARY went away in haste.
the carling made her so asham'd;
She had no will of such a guest
to lose her pains and be so blam'd.
Now good St PAUL, said MAGDALEN,
for that you are a learn'd man,
Go and convince this woman then,
for I have done all that I can.
Then went the good apostle PAUL,
to put the wife in better tune
Wash off the filth that files thy soul,
then shall Heaven's gates be opened soon.
Remember PAUL what thou hast done,
for all the epistles thou didst compile;
Though now thou sittest up above
thou persecutest CHRIST a while.
Saint PAUL said she, is it not so?
I did not know so well as ye:
But I will to my SAVIOUR go,
who will his favours shew to me;
You think you are of flyting free,
because you was rapt up above,
But yet it was CHRIST's grace to thee,
and matchlessness of his dear love.
Then PAUL she says, let PETER come,
if he be lying let him rise;
To whom I will confess my sin,

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and let him quickly give the keys.
Too long stand re'll be in;
for why I cannot long stay;
Then shall you all be out of pain,
for I must speak with the Saint MARY.
The good apostle discontent
right suddenly he turn'd
For he did very much re
to hear the carling pro
PAUL says, good brother
and make an end of.
And if so be you have th
open and let the carling
The apostle PETER rose at
and to the gate with speed
Carling says he, knock not to
you cumber MARY with your
PETER, she said, let C RIST an
and grant me mercy in my need,
For why I never deny'd him thrice,
as thou thyself hast done indeed.
Thou carling bold, what's that to thee?
I got remission for my sin,
It cost many sad tears to me,
before I entered here within.
Thou must be purified of sin,
and of all sins must be made free.
Saint PETER then no thanks to you,
that so you were rid of your fears,
It was CHRIS 's precious look I trow,
that made you weep these bitter tears.
The door of mercy is not clos'd,
I may get mercy as well as ye,
It is not so as ye suppose,
I will be in, in spite of thee.
But wicked wife, it is too late,
thou shouldest have mourned on the earth;
Repentance now is out of date,
it should have been before thy death;
Thou mightest then have turned wrath,

to mercy then, and mercy got,
 But now the LORD is very loath,
 ah ! PETER then what shall I do ?
 Hell will not have me as I hear ;
 shall I despair of mercy too,
 No. no I trust in mercy dear,
 and if I perish here I'll stay,
 And never go from heaven bright,
 I'll ever hope and always pray,
 until I get my SAVIOUR'S light.
 I think indeed, you are not right,
 if you had faith you could win in,
 Importune then with all your might,
 faith is the feet wherewith you came.
 But good Saint PETER let me be,
 had you such faith, did it abound ?
 When you did walk upon the sea,
 was you not like for to be drown'd ?
 Had not our SAVIOUR helped thee :
 who came and took thee by the hand ;
 So can my LORD do unto me,
 and bring me to the promis'd land ;
 Is my faith weak, yet he is strong,
 the same, and ever shall remain ;
 His mercy lasts, and his good will,
 to bring me to his flock again ;
 He will me help. and me relieve,
 and will increase my faith also,
 If weakly I can but believe,
 for from this place I'll never go.
 But PETER said, how can that be ?
 how darest thou look him in the face ?
 Such horrid sinners like to thee,
 can have no courage to get grace :
 Here none come in but they that's stout,
 and suffered have for the good cause,
 Like unto thee are kepted out
 for thou hast broke all MOSES laws.
 PETER, said she, I do appeal
 from MOSES, and from thee also ;

With him and you I'll not prevail,
 but to my SAVIOUR I will go;
 Indeed of old you was right stout,
 when you did cut off MALCHUS ear,
 But after that you went about,
 and a poor maid did you fear:
 Wherefore Saint PETER do forbear,
 a comforter indeed you're not,
 Let me alone I do not fear.
 take home the whistle of your groat
 Was it your own or PAUL's good sword?
 When that your courage was so keen,
 You was right stout upon my word,
 then would you fain at fishing been;
 For at the crowing of the cock
 you did deny your MASTER thrice,
 For all your stoutness turn'd a block,
 now flyte no more if ye be wise,
 Yet at the last the LORD arose,
 invironed with ANG ES bright,
 And to the wife in haste he goes,
 desir'd her soon pass out of sight.
 O LORD, sh said, now do me right,
 but not according to my sin,
 Have ye not promised day and night,
 when sinners knock to let them in.
 He said, thou wrests the Scripture now,
 the night is come, thou spends the day,
 In whoredom thou hast lived long,
 and to repent did'st delay,
 Still my commandments thou abused'st,
 and vice committed be'stily
 Since thou my mercy refused'st,
 go down to hell eternally
 O LORD, my soul doth testify,
 that I have spent my time in vain,
 Oh! make a wandering sheep of me,
 and bring me to the flock again.
 Thinkest thou there is no court to crave,
 of all these gifts in thee was planted,

I gave thee beauty above the lave,
 and a request you never wanted.
 Conform unto the Jewish laws,
 was brought to thee to be put down,
 But nevertheless thou let'st her go,
 and make the Pharasies afraid.
 Indeed, says CHRIST, it was right so,
 and that my bidding was obey'd,
 Woman, said he, I must not call
 the childrens bread to dogs like thee.
 Altho' my mercy still doth last
 yet is there mercy none for thee.
 But loving LORD, may I presume,
 poor woman that I may speak again,
 The dogs for hunger was undone,
 and of the crumbs they were right fain;
 Grant me one crumb that does fall,
 from thy best childrens table LORD,
 That I may be refresh'd withal,
 it will to me help enough afford.
 The gates of mercy are now clos'd,
 and thou can'st hardly enter in,
 It is not so as thou suppos'd,
 for thou art daily sick in sin.
 It's true indeed my LORD most meek,
 my sore and sickness I do feel,
 Yet I will never go away,
 for altho' in youth I had a sway,
 To whom shall I go in old age?
 or who shall I with sin engage?
 For I was old and out of breath,
 'although I be the wife of *Beith*.
 In *Beith* I liv'd this fifty years
 and after death I did come here;
 Now from this place I'll never go,
 for still I say it shall be so
 Yet thou the lame did'st truly lead,
 who lay long at *Bethsaida's* pool,
 Of many that never sought,
 like to the poor *Samaritan*,

When thou into the fold him brought,
 even as thou did the widow of *Nain*,
 Most gracious GOD, did thou not bid
 all that are weary come to thee?

Behold I come, even overlaid
 with sin. have mercy upon me.
 The issues of thy soul are great,
 thou art both leperous and unclean,
 To be with me you are unfit,
 go from me then, let me alone.

MASTER, said she, it must be granted,
 my sins are great, give me contrition:

The forlorn son when he repented,
 obtain'd his father's full remission.

I spared my judgements many times,
 and spiritual pastors did thee lend,
 But thou renewed thy former crimes,
 ay more and more me to offend.

My LORD, said she, I do amend,
 lamenting for my former vice,

The poor thief at the latter end,
 for one word went to Paradise.

The thief heard never of my teaching,
 my heavenly precepts and my laws,

But thou was daily at my preachings,
 both heard and saw and yet misca's.

MASTER, said she, the Scripture shows,
 the Jewish woman which broke thy laws,

Sweet LORD, my GOD, say me not nay,
 for if I perish, here I'll die.

Poor silly wretch, now speak no more,
 thy faith, poor soul, hath saved thee,

Enter, go in unto my glory,
 and rest through all eternity.

F I N I S

